

## **Lessons Learned from Other States: Interviews With SWCP Coordinators**

To date, 13 other states have gone through the process of completing a State Wetland Conservation Plan. Each of these plans has met with varying success, from establishing new goals and statewide cooperation, to colorfully taking up space on a shelf. The lead project coordinators for these plans were interviewed, and asked a range of questions on the format, development, problems and successes of their plans. They provided a wealth of information, which has been summarized and grouped into four categories for ease of comprehension. These categories are; consistent problems, sound advice, innovations, and scenarios worth mentioning.

**1) Consistent Problems** – these troubles seemed to crop up in most of the plans, and probability for their occurrence appears to be inherent in undertaking a project of this scope.

- A general mistrust of the lead agency was often present, and felt at times by ALL represented groups.
- The duration of the project development went far too long, resulting in waning interest, insufficient funds, and logistical complexities.
- Environmental representatives and private interests often did not work well together, especially where agricultural issues were concerned.
- Little to no implementation often occurred following the plan, resulting from a lack of a competent strategy for putting the plan into action.
- The lead agency was bogged down with too much work dealing with the SWCP, added to their already busy schedule.

**2) Sound Advice** – recommendations falling into this category are statements that were repeated by several coordinators, address common problems, and are applicable to any state's plan.

- The Wetlands Strategy Guidebook was recommended as a useful reference.
- Agreement on a set of ground rules including scope, definitions, and goals was needed.
- Using an outside or professional moderator helps to solve many fears about “hidden agendas,” and promotes cooperation.
- Each participant needs a role in the plan's implementation, and a vested interest in seeing it through.
- Issues that cannot be resolved at the present time or the current context, should be postponed or left unaddressed.
- Involve all interested, influential, or affected parties, including local organizations.
- Set manageable and measurable goals.
- A general consensus should be reached on all issues, everyone does not have to agree that each decision is the best, but they should all agree that it is acceptable.
- Every time a committee or group meets, they should have something material that they are reviewing or commenting on, each meeting should not start from scratch.

**3) Innovations** – suggestions in this section are unique solutions to common or uncommon problems. Not all of these ideas may work in Maryland, but they may help us to create innovations of our own.

- A web-based database was set up for landowners interested in mitigation on their property, and those needing sites for mitigation.
- An in-lieu fee program was set up with a widely usable scope, allowing agencies to personally complete mitigation projects of the type and in the locations that they most desired.
- Different management practices were agreed upon for wetlands in urban, rural, developing, and pristine areas, since uses and pressures on these areas were inherently different.
- Other needed information-gathering documents, such as a study on the potential for mitigation banking, were commissioned by the SWCP.
- Specific gaps in protection for the individual state were addressed.
- The plan was used as an overall methodology and guidance, but specific actions were fostered by regional and local groups.
- A state university was used to carry out some of the plan's needed research.
- A methodology "blueprint" for restoration/mitigation was developed by one state.
- In one instance, personality conflicts became strong, and traditionally opposed groups became opposed to anything produced by the other, regardless of merit. In this case, objections to proposals, documents, or other work was required to be put into writing, along with valid reasoning for why it was opposed. This forced groups to judge on merit rather than stance, and decreased disagreements.

**4) Scenarios Worth Mentioning** – there were some instances in individual states, where events that took place are important enough to a planning process such as this, to examine individually.

- Tennessee had several issues to overcome. They were not allowed to create a new office, and were promised no new state money or staff. This forced them to focus on the roles of other groups in implementing the plan. They have additionally received over \$3 million from the EPA in grants to augment their program. The plan also had to deal with some serious past issues. The Corps had channelized many streams in the State, and people wanted to be compensated for losses if anything was done to alter these channels. A conflict between the Corps and landowners soon arose.
- The State of Arkansas switched governors, (and from a Democratic one to a Republican one), while the plan was in development. This drastic change left the plan out on a limb, and it was very difficult to gain it any credibility afterward.
- Washington State's planning team became bogged down with unresolvable issues, leaving everyone at the end unhappy with the plan, and unwilling to implement it.
- Vermont's plan failed to have any strength in its implementation, and did not resolve many problems that existed beforehand. After it was finished, most did not involve themselves further.
- North Carolina's plan was coordinated by their 401 group of their department. Even other agencies are therefore not regarding it therefore as a statewide plan, but just a plan for the water quality division.